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“Strenuous Life” Strained: Political and Social Survival Strategies of the New Orleans Athletic Club, 1923-1940

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

by

Shawn G. Ryder

B.A. State University of New York at Purchase College, 2007

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Abstract

The New Orleans Athletic Club, founded in 1872, is one of the oldest athletic clubs in the United States that still operates today. After the boom of the 1920s and increased revenues, the club was forced to confront the Great Depression and shift its emphasis on the “strenuous life” to the “social life” to survive. The club had capitalized on the popularity of boxing during the 1920s and just finished constructing a lavish new club house when the stock market crashed in 1929. With members losing their jobs, the popularity of boxing waning, and the club in dire financial straits, the club looked for alternative strategies to survive. Its “social life” strategy relied on the club’s various political ties to cut expenses and increased incentives for membership, which led to a larger, albeit, limited presence of women at the club.

Keywords: New Orleans, Strenuous Life, Boxing, Sports, *NOAC*, Great Depression, Women, Elite Clubs, Gymnastic

Alexander Heinemann was dead. On January 9, 1930, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* front page headline read that “Heinemann Kills Himself in Baseball Park He Loved.”¹ His death had been dramatic – a bullet through the head after one final inspection of the baseball stadium he owned. Heinemann had “a colorful career,” rising from a peanut vendor to a key figure in the New Orleans sports world as president and treasurer of the New Orleans Baseball and Amusement Company.² Heinemann was also an active member of the New Orleans Athletic Club (NOAC). Just three months earlier, in a *Times-Picayune* article, Heinemann had challenged anyone to “just try to keep me away” from napping in an easy chair at the new NOAC club house at 222 North Rampart Street.³ The paper speculated that Heinemann’s suicide was motivated by deteriorating health, adding that Heinemann had lost \$300,000 in the recent stock market crash. The NOAC’s monthly magazine, *The Punch*, declared that Heinemann’s suicide was simply a matter of “PRIDE.”⁴ The club’s magazine asserted that the club man “had fought the battle of life and won” but “his PRIDE would not permit him to carry on, unable to do the things he had dreamed.”⁵ Amid his “recent financial and physical reverses,” *The Punch* assured club members that Heinemann “passed on to a kinder and happier world.” Heinemann had been a victim of the Great Depression. It had stripped him of his wealth, and rather than lose his standing, he took his own life. In contrast, the club that he loved would develop strategies to hold onto both in the midst of the greatest financial disaster in American history.

The Great Depression challenged and changed the world. Institutions that could not or would not adapt new strategies to navigate the harsh economic climate risked demise. The world

¹ *Times-Picayune*, January 9, 1930.

² “Pelican President Puts Gun in Mouth and Pulls Trigger,” *Times-Picayune*, January 9, 1930.

³ “‘Try and Keep Me Away’ Defy of A.J. Heinemann,” *Times-Picayune*, October 4, 1929.

⁴ “Club Loses Real Member in Alexander Julius Heinemann,” *The Punch*, 7 (January 1930): 9, New Orleans Athletic Club Collection, Addendum 1, (295-1), Louisiana and Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans [hereafter cited as NOACC-A1 with appropriate box number].

⁵ “Club Loses Real Member in Alexander Julius Heinemann,” NOACC-A1 (295-1).

of sport was not immune to the challenge. While many sporting institutions failed, how did others survive? What were initial reactions of sporting institutions to the Depression and in what ways did these institutions change in order to survive? And what can the efforts to save sporting institutions tell us about priorities of some societies under pressure?

As historian Charles C. Alexander notes in his study of baseball, seldom have sports historians examined the years 1930 to 1941 “as a distinct span of time, strikingly different from what had gone before or would come after.”⁶ Steven Riess argues that sports history reflects “continuous interaction of the elements of urbanization – physical structure, social organizations, and value systems – with each other and with sport.”⁷ Many sports historians follow what Stephen Hardy calls “the *urban paradigm*,” which emphasizes the close association between the development of cities and the development of sports in case studies.⁸ While the Great Depression’s effects on cities have been interpreted by urban historians, its effects on sports remain largely unexamined.

Most case studies that do focus on the rise of sports emphasize the period between the Civil War and the end of World War I.⁹ Although Hardy argues that events that occurred after this period “were largely addition to, not major changes in, the structures that had grown” from the nineteenth century, Alexander’s Depression-era study of baseball shows that even major league baseball was forced to adopt alternative strategies and innovations during the financial

⁶ Charles C. Alexander, *Breaking the Slump: Baseball in the Depression Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), ix.

⁷ Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1.

⁸ Stephen Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), xvii, emphasis in original.

⁹ For more case studies on sports development, see: Dale Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans 1850-1900*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1972); Melvin Adelman, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-1870* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Gerald R. Gems, *Windy City Wars: Labor, Leisure, and Sport in the Making of Chicago*, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997); and Steven Hardy, *How Boston Played*.

crisis. This paper will explore the impact of the Great Depression on athletic institutions through a case study of the New Orleans Athletic Club. An active institution since its founding in 1872, the NOAC's longevity and membership, comprised of many of New Orleans' elite, makes it an excellent focus for investigation. By the 1920s, the NOAC prided itself on being the premier athletic club of New Orleans. From its humble inception as the Independent Gymnastic Club in J.C. Alex's backyard in 1872 until its integration by race and gender in the late 1980s, the NOAC served as a bastion for southern white men.¹⁰ When the club admitted blacks (1986) and women (1989), it did so out of economic necessity, not moral conscience. Similarly, one finds NOAC leaders making pragmatic decisions in order to survive the 1930s economic crisis.

The Depression fundamentally altered the purpose of the club, from the "strenuous life"¹¹ philosophy that had gripped the United States at the opening of the twentieth century and fueled a boom in the popularity of sports, to an emphasis on the club's role in New Orleans high society. The strenuous life embraced a rugged form of masculinity that aimed to allay fears of American political and social elites who perceived the decline and feminization of the American "race" due to a flood of poor, new immigrants from Europe. The strenuous life was also thought to provide an antidote to one of the most terrifying byproducts of the industrial economy – neurasthenia. Many experts viewed neurasthenia as the neurological and physiological side effect of industrialization and the sedentary lifestyle created for upper and middle classes.

¹⁰ John D. Fair, "Strongmen of the Crescent City: Weightlifting at the New Orleans Athletic Club, 1872-1972," *Louisiana History*, 45, (Autumn 2004): 408.

¹¹ For more on the Strenuous Life, see: John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: the White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), Donald J. Mrozek, *Sport and American Mentality, 1880-1910* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), Kim Townsend, *Manhood at Harvard: William James and Others* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), Kevin Kokomoor, "The 'Most Strenuous of Anglers' Sports Is Tarpon Fishing': The Silver King As Progressive Era Outdoor Sport," *The Journal of Sport History*, 37, (Autumn 2010): 347-364.

Neurasthenia was blamed for everything from back pain to depression. For institutional survival, the NOAC exchanged the “strenuous life” for the “social life,” one which relied on its political ties and the social aspects of the club to attract and retain membership – a strategy that proved successful in difficult financial times

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, various sporting institutions emerged in America. The urban athletic club –which catered predominately to elites and upper middle-class citizens – became a means for the new rich to show their status. The New York Athletic Club (NYAC), founded in 1868, shifted its emphasis from sports to society during the 1880s, selecting “more socially oriented men in the Social Register.”¹² As urban athletic clubs emerged, the suburban country club also flourished. Like their urban counterparts, the country club afforded members a great deal of prestige and affirmation of their membership in high society. Country clubs and athletic clubs, as historian George Kirsch notes, “were products of several trends and forces among the nation’s elite and middle classes during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”¹³ One of the most popular trends among the elites was erecting lavish clubhouses. In 1885, the NYAC spent \$150,000 on its five-story clubhouse,¹⁴ while in 1888 the Boston Athletic Association doubled the New York Athletic Club’s expenditure for its own exquisite home.¹⁵ After large investments in clubhouses during the 1880s and 1890s, the Depression of 1893 led to the demise of many of these clubs.¹⁶ Although the NOAC survived the 1893 Depression, at the onset of the Great Depression, it had just finished construction of an extravagant new facility and risked the fate suffered by many associations during the 1893 depression.

¹² Steven A. Riess, *Sport in Industrial America: 1850-1920* (Wheeling, IL :Harlan Davidson, Inc, 1995), 51-52.

¹³ George Kirsch, *Golf in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

¹⁴ Steven A. Riess, *Sport in Industrial America*, 52.

¹⁵ Stephen Hardy, *How Boston Played*, 13.

¹⁶ Steven A. Riess, *Sports in Industrial America*, 53.

As an elite institution, the NOAC, like other longstanding athletic clubs, required all members to pay an initiation fee upon being accepted into the club, in addition to their quarterly dues. The NOAC categorized its members into five groups: juveniles (ages 8-17); associates (ages 18-21); senior members (offered the option to purchase stock to help finance the club); non-resident members, for those outside the city limits; and athletic members. The athletic membership allowed athletes, hand-picked by the Athletic Director, to pay discounted dues. The athletic members were expected to compete and win honors for the club; however, they were often restricted from attending many of the club's social functions. In addition to various types of membership, journalists and politicians were given free memberships, provided they met the approval of the membership committee. The committee reviewed applicants who had been referred by a member of the club, and then the committee submitted a list of names to the board of directors for final approval or disapproval. Membership was the core element to establishing the NOAC as a dominant figure in the Southern social-athletic world. Dues from the membership roster were at the heart of the club's boom years in the 1920s, and membership helped the club weather the Great Depression.

In February of 1930, just a few weeks after the stock market crash, the NOAC's athletic director and editor of *The Punch*, Irwin Poché, expressed optimism for the coming year. In his editorial, "It's 1930 – And We're Sitting Pretty," Poché bragged that

it is a highly satisfying feeling that comes with the thought that you are part of a sound, substantial organization like the New Orleans Athletic Club. We hear cries from every corner of the city from some of the bigger clubs of the depressed conditions. The big[,] recent landslide in stocks only made things worse. But here we have enjoyed one of our best years. In fact[,] our best.¹⁷

¹⁷ Irwin Poché, "It's 1930 – And We're Sitting Pretty," *The Punch*, 7 (February 1930): 4, NOACC-A1, (295-1).

The NOAC had enjoyed a sizeable profit for the 1929 fiscal year of \$38,816.96 from all sources.¹⁸ Despite Poché's optimism in the article, he was not blind to the crisis faced by his club members as he encouraged club members that if "YOU MAY HAVE A JOB OPEN FOR A YOUNG MAN, IF SO GIVE OUR BOYS A CHANCE."¹⁹ If 1929 was the NOAC's best year, then the ten years that followed could be its most challenging.

The financial problems that plagued the NOAC during the 1930s had their roots in the booming 1920s. The Young Men's Gymnastic Club (YMGC), which changed its name to the New Orleans Athletic Club in May 1929,²⁰ had proved quite profitable between 1925 and 1929, averaging \$37,082.69 in profit each year (see figure 1).²¹ The club's accountants, Pilié and Seré, commended the club's profits in 1927, calling them "an enviable showing, and one which the Club, as a whole may justily [sic] be proud of."²² The booming profits in 1923 stemmed, in part, from the club's recent success promoting professional and amateur boxing. William Coker acquired a boxing license from the Louisiana Boxing Commission and began staging boxing matches for the club.²³ Boxing has played a long standing, integral role in New Orleans athletics. In his book, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans, 1850-1900*, Dale Somers details the long history of New Orleans boxing. Prizefighting grew popular in the United States and New Orleans in the second half of the nineteenth century – despite the opinion held by most upper class elites that professional boxing was barbaric at best.²⁴ In the 1890s, athletic clubs began sponsoring boxing matches and spectators increasingly were "composed of men on high social

¹⁸ Auditor's Report, August, 1929, New Orleans Athletic Club Collection (232-31), Louisiana and Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans [hereafter cited as NOACC with appropriate box number].

¹⁹ Irwin Poché, "Your Team and My Team," *The Punch*, 7 (February 1930): 5, NOACC-A1 (295-1), Emphasis in original.

²⁰ "Y.M.G.C. Changes Name at Banquet," *Times-Picayune*, May 8, 1929.

²¹ Financial Report from the Annual Stockholders' Meeting, 1925-1929, NOACC (232-30, 31).

²² Financial Report from the Annual Stockholders' Meeting, August 31, 1927, NOACC (232-30).

²³ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, April 18, 1923, NOACC (232-30).

²⁴ Dale Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans*, 159-162.

standing... and thereby given the sport society's seal of approval."²⁵ David McComb explains that the introduction of the Marquis of Queensberry rules made boxing more palatable for upper class tastes, featuring timed rounds, gloves, weight classes, and prohibiting blows to parts of the body.²⁶ The involvement of athletic clubs in boxing not only reformed the image, but perfected the "mechanics of promotion."²⁷ Boxing evolved into a commercial entity, and "New Orleans athletic clubs did more than simply attract new talent; they helped systemize boxing."²⁸ Weight classes, professional referees, limited rounds, and gloves made the sport open to all classes.²⁹ On September 7, 1892, the new age of boxing was christened in New Orleans, when Gentleman Jim Corbett defeated the bare-knuckle champion, John L. Sullivan for the first world title under the Marquis of Queensbury rules at Pelican Athletic Club.³⁰

Boxing's rise in popularity after the Sullivan-Corbett fight solidified the strenuous life's place in American society. Theodore Roosevelt, President and grand champion of the strenuous life, embodied all the virtues of the new man for the twentieth century. Despite the "leading authority on physical education [warning him] that he had 'heart trouble' and should lead a sedentary life," Theodore Roosevelt advanced himself through his physical endeavors.³¹ He rowed and played football at Harvard; he hunted big game, volunteered for the Spanish-American War, and boxed in the White House. Roosevelt, as other patrons of the strenuous life, "emphasized duty, bodily vigor, action over reflection, experience over 'book learning,' and

²⁵ Dale Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans*, 189.

²⁶ David G. McComb, *Sports in World History* (New York: Taylor and Francis Inc., 2004), 56.

²⁷ Somers, 190.

²⁸ Elliot J. Gorn, *The Manly Art, Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 242.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 243-246.

³¹ John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: the White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 5.

pragmatic idealism over romantic sentimentality.”³² Boxing asserted the values of aggressiveness and courage over passive domesticity. Whether bare-knuckle or gloved, observed Elliott Gorn, “prize fighting was not merely entertainment but the expression of a way of life” for bourgeoisie men at the turn of the century.³³

On May 6, 1923, the *Times-Picayune* announced that lightweight Basil Galiano had signed to fight Pal Moran in the YMGC’s first professional fight to be held on May 28 at the Louisiana Auditorium.³⁴ The YMGC “arranged a capital card” with both the fighters scheduled to go fifteen rounds.³⁵ The *Times-Picayune* favored Moran over Galiano, and the city’s interest in the event was “at white heat.”³⁶ State and city officials, including Mayor Andrew McShane, bought tickets to the event as advance sales exceeded \$5,000 the day before the fight.³⁷ Galiano outlasted Moran in a 9-6 decision, fighting at a furious pace through the first ten rounds searching for a knockout.³⁸ The bout “was a credit to the club,” generating \$1,018 in revenue for the YMGC.³⁹ The next fight promoted by the club was held at Heinemann Park on the Fourth of July, 1923, and netted \$2,300 for the club. However, the event’s largest attraction was the direct telegraph line from a fight between Jack Dempsey and Tommy Gibbons in Shelby, Montana, which relayed details of the fight over a megaphone in the stadium. In the ring at Heinemann Park, two actors simulated the fight in Montana.⁴⁰ When a third fight resulted in a loss of \$300,

³² Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 33.

³³ Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 252.

³⁴ “Galiano and Moran Signed to Open Y.M.G.C Boxing,” *Times-Picayune*, May 6, 1923.

³⁵ “Galiano and Moran in Training Camps,” *Times-Picayune*, May 13, 1923, “Destrehan Planning Big Fair for St. Charles Parish,” *Times-Picayune*, May 18, 1923; The fighters trained outside the city to stay focused, just north of Lake Pontchartrain in Abita Springs and Mandeville, LA. To promote the fight, the fighters appeared at the Destrehan Welfare Association’s fair on May 20, to spar with their training partners, who would serve as preliminaries at the feature fight.

³⁶ “Moran is Favorite Over Basil Galiano For Tonight’s Bout,” *Times-Picayune*, May 28, 1923.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ “Viewing the News by Wm. McG. Keefe: Galiano’s Success,” *Times-Picayune*, May 30, 1923.

³⁹ Board of Directors’ Meeting Minutes, June 20, 1923, NOACC (232-30).

⁴⁰ “Direct Wire Leased by Y.M.G.C. for Fight,” *Times-Picayune*, July 2, 1923.

Coker blamed the weather and the indoor venue at the New Orleans Coliseum.⁴¹ Regardless of the Coliseum's drawbacks, the sport's popularity among YMGC club members encouraged the board of directors to sign a lease for eight additional bouts at the venue.⁴² The YMGC gained far more than money by sponsoring professional boxing – it won prestige and publicity in New Orleans. As *Times-Picayune* columnist Wm. McG. Keefe noted about the first fight, even had the club lost money on the match, “the pep and enthusiasm which has attended the G. C.’s entry into professional boxing has brought new life to the club.”⁴³ To continue increasing the membership, the club continued to supply the public's appetite for boxing.

Recognizing the value of boxing as an agent for recruiting, the YMGC board of directors instructed its Athletic and Games (AG) committee to host at least one free match of amateur or professional boxing each month for “members and their male friends.”⁴⁴ In an effort to bring the highest quality boxers to New Orleans under the YMGC banner, Coker attempted unsuccessfully to bring boxing champion Jack Dempsey to the city – offering \$500,000 for the fight.⁴⁵ Despite the club's inability to summon Dempsey, on January 11, 1924, Coker announced to the AG committee “that the Club had now on its schedule two very classy bouts.”⁴⁶ On January 14, the club would sponsor a match between Mickey Forkins and Red Hill, and on January 18, the bantamweight world champion, Joe Lynch, would trade blows with local Eddie McKenna. The Lynch fight not only offered potential for a big draw, but the fighter would use the club's athletic facilities to prepare for the contest. Club officials invited members to learn how a world class

⁴¹ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, July 18, 1923, NOACC (232-30).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Viewing the News By Wm. McG. Keefe: Spirit At Y.M.G.C.,” *Times-Picayune*, May 27, 1923.

⁴⁴ Athletic and Games Committee Meeting Minutes, January 11, 1924, NOACC (232-30), Emphasis in original; while previous fights were offered to the public, which included women, the free fights were intended as entertainment for an all male audience.

⁴⁵ “New Orleans Seeks Next Dempsey-Gibbons Bout,” *Boston Daily Globe* (1923-1927); July 6, 1923; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Boston Globe (1872-1925), 11.

⁴⁶ Athletic and Games Committee Meeting Minutes, January 11, 1924, NOACC (232-30).

athlete trained. The club provided members with a schedule “advising them dates which Champion Lynch would work out in order that they might see the Champion in action.”⁴⁷ Not only would Lynch work out at the club, but a handicap marathon horserace was held at the New Orleans Fair Grounds in his honor. The horserace, sponsored by both the YMGC and the New Orleans Business Men’s Racing Association, used the race for further publicizing the fight and the club.⁴⁸ Eddie McKenna treated local boxing enthusiasts to a show as he gave Lynch “a lacing in a ten round no decision bout.”⁴⁹

In the eight months since it began staging professional boxing, the YMGC profited over \$6,000 and made boxing a prominent part of New Orleans’ sporting scene. When the club began promoting fights, there were skeptics, such as columnist (and future member of Congress) F. Edward Hebert. As one of the “members of the dubious colony,” Hebert’s tune changed when the YMGC assembled high quality matches like the Lynch-McKenna fight.⁵⁰ The amount of time and energy required to organize and promote professional boxing grew to be more than the Athletic and Games committee chair, William Coker, wanted to devote. However, instead of giving up the club’s boxing license, he suggested that the club use a third party to continue making use of the profitable license.⁵¹ Shortly after leasing the boxing license to a promoter, the club saw losses of \$272.42 and \$860.82.⁵² The committee expressed its concern that making a profit would be difficult unless the promoter staged a national caliber fight and subsequently it

⁴⁷ Athletic and Games Committee Meeting Minutes, January 11, 1924, NOACC (232-30).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “Orleans Bantam Hands Lynch A Beating,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963); January 19, 1924; ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune (1849 – 1987), 12.

⁵⁰ F. Edw. Hebert, “The Sportscope; Titular Matches and the ‘G.C.’,” *Times-Picayune*, January 14, 1924.

⁵¹ Board of Directors’ Minutes, February 20, 1924, NOACC (232-30).

⁵² Young Men’s Gymnastic Club Finance Committee to Board of Directors, June 16, 1924, NOACC (232-30).

halted all fights left unapproved by the Board of Directors.⁵³ A more serious concern was the lack of insurance, which left the club liable to lawsuits.

The cancellation of fights prompted a response from William Coker, who emphasized the importance of boxing. He warned the Board of Directors that:

The license that this club holds to conduct boxing matches was obtained from the Louisiana Boxing Commission after no little effort on the part of your chairman [of the Athletic and Gymnastics Committee] and one or two other members of this board. It is a privilege that many other local institutions have endeavored to secure – this includes the American Legion – so therefore is of some value and should not be abandoned because of the whim of anyone who is not thoroughly familiar with the situation.⁵⁴

Coker continued to argue for the Board of Directors to remain patient in light of the losses, explaining:

When we first began to stage boxing shows your chairman personally assumed full responsibility for the venture and was successful in conducting them for about eight months. This he did soley [sic] for the benefit of the club. However, in time the burden became too heavy because of his having insufficient time to devote, and in order that the YMGC might not lose their license to conduct matches because of inactivity, he suggested that the board... get someone else to take up the work on the basis I handled it....⁵⁵

The Board of Directors opted to revise its contract with the promoter, Mr. Elmer, inserting a clause requiring the promoter to give proof of insurance and requiring him to cover any losses incurred at future fights.⁵⁶ In addition, the club offered Coker the position of promotional director to assist Elmer and organize club functions.

When the club applied for its boxing license in April 1923, it intended to raise money and increase membership dues “which have not been covering the cost of maintenance.”⁵⁷ The

⁵³ Young Men’s Gymnastic Club Finance Committee to Board of Directors, June 16, 1924, NOACC (232-30).

⁵⁴ William Coker to Board of Directors, July 16, 1924, NOACC (232-30).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Board of Directors’ Minutes, June 25, 1924, NOACC (232-30).

⁵⁷ “Young Men’s Gymnastic Club to Hold Professional Bouts,” *Times-Picayune*, April 1, 1923.

money made from the boxing exhibitions helped purchase a new roof and to help pay down the debt to mortgage bondholders. Success in boxing alleviated over \$80,000 of debt, which inspired many club members to focus on a new project – building an extravagant and expensive new athletic building.⁵⁸ At the annual stockholder’s meeting in 1925, club president B.C. McClellan stepped down from his post. Before he finished his term, he requested that the new regime take up the work necessary for a new building and establishing the YMGC as *the* premier athletic club in New Orleans.⁵⁹ To achieve the prominence desired by the board of directors, including McClellan, the club sought to move from the outskirts of the French Quarter on Rampart Street to the heart of the central business district. Since 1884, the club had been located on Burgundy Street between Iberville and Bienville streets, when for \$6,000 it purchased the “Old Boys High School.”⁶⁰ In 1889, it added property and an entrance on Rampart Street. While many members fantasized about a new location, the club’s legal counsel warned the new president, B.S. D’Antoni, to consider building on the property it already owned because it was unlikely the club could finance the costs of a new property and construction.⁶¹

As the club pressed on to research the options for its future home, Leon Tujague and William Coker traveled to athletic clubs in other major cities and reported on their facilities and sources of revenue (see Figure 2.a-2.e). They visited clubs like the Minneapolis Athletic Club and the Chicago Athletic Association which maintained memberships between 1,700 and 3,400 and charged dues of \$100 on average. While many of the clubs that Tujague and Coker visited maintained the same services for members as the New Orleans Club (e.g. Turkish Baths), the most profitable service offered by these clubs was the rental of private rooms to members, which

⁵⁸ Annual Stockholders’ Meeting Minutes, September 9, 1925, NOACC (232-30).

⁵⁹ Ibid., Emphasis mine.

⁶⁰ “New Plant is Value at \$750,000,” *Times-Picayune*, October 4, 1929.

⁶¹ Board of Directors’ Minutes, February 15, 1927, NOACC (232-30).

the YMGC did not offer members.⁶² After considering the options, Tujague and Coker recommended that the club model their future on the St. Louis Athletic Club, with the preliminary plans for the new building including “all modern features, Ladies and Men’s Baths, stores, and 60 or 70 rooms.”⁶³

The preliminary plans submitted by Diboll and Owen⁶⁴ were extravagant and expensive, estimating that the total costs for acquiring land and construction would top one million dollars. Coker staged a number of open houses and banquets for members’ families and friends to win support for the new clubhouse. At a banquet held on March 19, 1927, a poem printed atop the menu emphasized unity, informing guests that for “a project vast/ our purpose is intent./ A Home that costs a Million/ We’ll rear upon this site;/ So lets all Stand Together, / And Pledge Success to-night.”⁶⁵ Despite the cost, the club’s membership was unified in its desire for a new facility. McClellan reported that “Several members of the CLUB have discussed with me a New Club House, and I am of the firm opinion that a new Club House is essential....”⁶⁶ Hibernia Bank of New Orleans offered to consider a loan up to 60%; however, the board deferred accepting the offer until it had bondholders’ approval.⁶⁷ In advance of a special meeting for the club’s stockholders, the board of directors extended the right to own stock to its associate members “at par (\$50).”⁶⁸

On June 28, 1927, the club held a special meeting of stockholders to discuss the prospects of a new clubhouse. The meeting addressed concerns of stockholders and presented arguments for and against the construction of a new building. With split opinions on the subject, a vote was

⁶² Board of Directors’ Meeting Minutes, December 21, 1926, NOACC (232-30).

⁶³ Board of Directors’ Meeting Minutes, January 18, 1926, NOACC (232-30).

⁶⁴ The architects themselves were active members in the YMGC/NOAC.

⁶⁵ Dinner Menu, March 19, 1927, NOACC (232-14).

⁶⁶ William McClellan to A.E Dupre June 29, 1926, NOACC (232-30).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ May 17, 1927, Board of Directors’ Meeting Minutes, NOACC (232-30).

held to determine whether a new facility would be built, whether it should remain at its current location or be moved closer to the central business district, and how much money the club was willing to spend on the project. Stockholders voted in favor of a new building⁶⁹ and a new location⁷⁰ at a cost of \$750,000 (see figure 3).⁷¹ After the vote, however, the Board of Directors' building committee presented its preferred locations for the new club facility; its choices were between a property at Common and Gravier streets and one at Gravier and Dryades streets. The board was still split on the prospect of a new location and held another vote, which determined by a margin of 8 to 4 that the new club building would be built at its existing location.⁷²

After providing two years of leadership for the YMGC and the planning of its new facility, time constraints forced D'Antoni to resign from the Board of Directors.⁷³ D'Antoni's replacement, Leon Tujague was not as successful in his attempts to negotiate terms for financing the new facility. Having been turned down by the Whitney Bank, the Marine Bank, and the Canal Bank for a loan, Tujague informed the board that it was pointless to apply anywhere else. Citing the previous four years of profit and the size of the loan, the new facility was simply too large of a risk.⁷⁴ The caution of the banks would work in the club's favor during the lean years of the Depression, preventing it from overbuilding and the cumbersome repayments that doomed many other upscale athletic clubs in the 1893 and 1929 depressions. Tujague urged club members to persevere in light of the setback and renovate a small part of the club to use during

⁶⁹ 221-182, in favor.

⁷⁰ 172-41 in favor.

⁷¹ Special Stockholder's Meeting Minutes, June 27, 1927, NOACC (232-30).

⁷² Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, November 22, 1927, NOACC (232-30).

⁷³ B.S. D'Antoni to Board of Directors, October 18, 1927, NOACC (232-30).

⁷⁴ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, December 20, 1927, NOACC (232-30).

construction a new facility on the Rampart Street property.⁷⁵ With a plan of action, the board of directors took bids⁷⁶ for construction, electing Diboll and Owen Ltd.⁷⁷

In March 1928, the firm of Diboll & Owen presented blueprints to the board and the estimate of costs was well under the \$750,000 maximum voted by the stockholders.⁷⁸ The club's building committee nixed plans for six floors of hotel rooms, and with the initial plans in place, the club began taking bids to finance the project. In May 1928, the YMGC resolved to accept the bid of the New Orleans Securities, Inc.⁷⁹ The New Orleans Securities bid offered, "subject to approval of title and all legal details, \$200,000 First Mortgage Serial 6% Bonds, and have arranged... a second mortgage up to \$50,000."⁸⁰ With financing in place, President Tujague declared "the Club's present financial condition and the prospects for the future are the best in its career; while the physical appearance of the Club are to say the least, unsightly, dilapidated and in urgent need of replacement."⁸¹ Tujague presented the financial details to the membership as well as his goals for the club, emphasizing his ambition that "even before the tearing down of the first brick of our present quarters... there is no reason in the world why we should not increase our present membership at least 300 members."⁸²

On November 19, 1928, the Young Men's Gymnastic Club closed its Rampart Street entrance as construction on its new facility began.⁸³ During the building phase, members still attended athletic classes, indoor baseball games, and handball tournaments, in a gymnasium

⁷⁵ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, December 20, 1927, NOACC (232-30).

⁷⁶ Three firms submitted bids which received votes by the club: Weiss, Dreyfous & Seiferth Inc. (1), Diboll & Owen Ltd. (9), and Sam Stone Jr & Co. (1).

⁷⁷ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, January 31, 1928, NOACC (232-30).

⁷⁸ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, March 22, 1928, NOACC (232-30), The firm calculated construction costs would equal 45 cents per cubic foot or a total of \$451,235.54 total.

⁷⁹ Special Meeting of the Board of Directors' Minutes, May 10, 1928, (232-30).

⁸⁰ Roy Watson to Leon Tujague, May 10, 1928, (232-30).

⁸¹ Leon Tujague (address, Young Men's Gymnastic Club, New Orleans, LA, May 17, 1928), NOACC (232-30).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ "G.C. to Carry On While Builders Erect New Home on Rampart St.," *Times-Picayune*, November 18, 1928.

made of two converted handball courts.⁸⁴ As the club rebuilt its facility, it renamed itself the New Orleans Athletic Club. The name change, as Allison Owen explained in an address to members during a banquet at the Jung Hotel, “would link the City of New Orleans far more definitely with the athletic activities of the nation.”⁸⁵ New Orleans mayor Arthur J. O’Keefe and Louisiana Governor Huey P. Long sent messages expressing their regret that they could not attend the ceremony. When the club’s new facility opened its doors in October 1929, the *Times-Picayune* dedicated an entire section of the paper to the club, promoting its many features and the messages of goodwill from businesses throughout the city. Mayor O’Keefe and the city’s commissioners expressed their congratulations to the club in a full page advertisement.⁸⁶ The club insisted that people join before it reached its “membership quota” warning that “late applicants will have to be patient and wait until some fellow dies or moves from the city.”⁸⁷ The club would never reach its limit on membership – the boom years of the 1920s would soon be over, Heinemann would be dead, and the NOAC would rely increasingly on its role not as an athletic institution but as center of New Orleans high society – a very influential society.

Between 1925 and 1930, NOAC enjoyed an average annual profit of \$32,491.23. However, between 1931 and 1935, the club saw an average loss of just over \$4,000, with 1935 its worst year of the Depression, with a loss of over \$11,000 (see figure 1). The largest source of income, membership dues, remained above its 1925 low of \$57,940 throughout the Depression; however, repaying the loan on the new clubhouse increased the overall expense. Other sources of income reflect how some members coped with the Depression. The club’s gaming machines were one of its most profitable departments. Reductions in salary and lost jobs forced desperate

⁸⁴ “G.C. to Carry On While Builders Erect New Home on Rampart St.,” *Times-Picayune*, November 18, 1928.

⁸⁵ “Y.M.G.C. Changes Name at Banquet,” *Times-Picayune*, May 8, 1929.

⁸⁶ “Achievement!,” *Times-Picayune*, October 4, 1929.

⁸⁷ “Initiation Fee Not Suspended,” *Times-Picayune*, October 4, 1929.

members to risk money in the club's slot machines. Slot machine receipts for the 1930 fiscal year spiked to over \$30,000, over \$9,000 more than the machines brought in during 1929 (see figure 4). Financial hardship purged the club of unlucky members as slot receipts dropped sharply, reaching their lowest point in 1935, when they totaled just over \$5,000.

By 1932, the NOAC's board of directors faced a crisis. The club was losing thousands of dollars each month in operating costs and hundreds of its members – the most substantial source of revenue. Without enough new members, Leon Tujague, board member and former president warned “that the club face[d] a \$5,000 loss for 1932 operations.”⁸⁸ The promotional director met with members who resigned and informed the board that while many members intended to restore their memberships, “the vast majority, however, [were] resigning for no other reason than to retrench financially.”⁸⁹ Club secretary A.E. Dupre, provided information from surveys conducted with members who had been elected into the club but had failed to pay the club's initiation fee. As with other devices used by athletic clubs, the fee was designed to keep “social inferiors” from joining, ensuring the exclusivity of membership.⁹⁰ With the Depression, newly elected NOAC members, however, suffering from sudden financial hardship, and despite having a desirable social status, did not have the money for the initiation fee. Many who declined the fee admitted that they were “financially embarrassed” due to a job loss or decrease in salary.⁹¹ Others were unable to pay the initiation fee because their jobs had been transferred to places like Little Rock or Chicago.

More disconcerting to the NOAC's board of directors were the numbers of members quitting the club. Although members were required to submit a formal letter of resignation, they

⁸⁸ Board of Directors' Special Meeting Minutes, January 27, 1932, NOACC (232-31).

⁸⁹ William Coker to Board of Directors, September 28, 1932, NOACC (232-32).

⁹⁰ Elliot J. Gorn and Warren Goldstein, *A Brief History of American Sports* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 136.

⁹¹ A.E. Dupre to Membership Committee, October 11, 1932, NOACC (232-32).

were not required to specify why they were leaving the club. In 1934, Poché sent out surveys to numerous resigning members. Some did not return the surveys or insisted that the club examine their letter or resignation but,⁹² the surveys paint a picture of the difficulties facing ordinary NOAC members and their motivations for joining the club. Many members, like H. Bailey, joined for “fellowship and recreation” but quit having “never been in the building since joining.”⁹³ Many club members were forced to work longer hours, which diminished their available leisure time. A.E. Moore joined the club in May 1932 to be with his friends and to extend the hospitality of the Club to a friend from New York, who came here twice a year on business, and who enjoyed an occasional work out and Turkish Bath.”⁹⁴ Moore quit because his free time and money disappeared. The Depression’s financial impact forced members to make tough choices about where their money went, or as Maurice Zimmerman wrote, “I have to give more money home.”⁹⁵ Sometimes, in the case of L.M. Hinote, members had to choose between the club and marriage. In a letter to Poché describing his circumstances, Hinote resigned from the club to get married. Although he had spent fifteen dollars in addition to his dues for equipment, marriage was a key priority. The Depression had forced Hinote to put off getting married for two years as he had “not seen my way clear to do so.”⁹⁶ However, after he had joined the club, his employer intervened, promising to raise his salary provided he stopped “going out every night until late.”⁹⁷ Medical bills contributed to several members financial hardships. Emergency medical conditions could spell havoc for members such as Dr. E. Dupont, who suffered from appendicitis or B.H. Brannan whose medical condition required two

⁹² Club members were required to formally resign in writing, giving a reason for quitting.

⁹³ H. Bailey Survey, NOACC (232-42).

⁹⁴ A.E. Moore Survey, NOACC (232-42).

⁹⁵ Maurice Zimmerman Survey, NOACC (232-42).

⁹⁶ L.M. Hinote to Irwin F. Poché, July 10, 1934, NOACC (232-42).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

surgeries.⁹⁸ Despite Brannan's suggestion that the club "arrange a sort of moratorium" on membership dues, the club made no exceptions, forcing Brannan to quit.⁹⁹ No matter why a member quit or failed to pay the initiation fee, the NOAC lost its most substantial source of income: membership dues.

The Depression affected all members, in particular, athletic members who were recruited more for their athletic talents than their social position. In a letter to the Athletic and Games (AG) committee chairman Dr. Russell Stone, athletic director Poché addressed "a matter of grave importance [sic] to the welfare of the athletic department.... With the curtailment of work and the lowering of salaries our athletic members have been have been hard pressed to pay their dues."¹⁰⁰ Poché called for action, attaching a table comparing the NOAC with other clubs throughout the nation that offered athletic memberships (see figure 5).¹⁰¹ Dues for athletic members were the second highest in the nation. The board of directors responded to Poché's concerns by reducing the athletic membership fee and increasing the maximum number of athletes to 135.¹⁰² This helped preserve the athletic core of the NOAC, yet failed to help the club's less athletic and more social members. The board of directors needed a solution.

The club tried everything to save money. The club renegotiated its contract with Pilie & Seré, the club's accounting firm that audited its records every quarter.¹⁰³ Its monthly magazine, *The Punch*, cut the number of its pages and Poché worked harder to find advertisements to offset the expense of publication.¹⁰⁴ It rented space to a barber.¹⁰⁵ The Business Men's Credit Bureau offered to serve as a collection agency for the club to recover delinquent's dues. The club's

⁹⁸ Dr. E. Dupont Survey and C.L. Osterberger Survey, NOACC (232-42).

⁹⁹ B.H. Brannan Survey, NOACC (232-42).

¹⁰⁰ Irwin Poché to Dr. Russell E. Stone, October 25, 1932, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, October 26, 1932, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁰³ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, January 25, 1933, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁰⁴ Irwin Poché to Dr. Russell E. Stone, January 18, 1933, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁰⁵ Financial Report from the Annual Stockholder's Meeting, August 31, 1930 (232-31).

Governing Committee (GC) declined the offer; instead, it offered unemployed members the collections duty for a commission that was 10-15% less than the commission offered by credit bureau.¹⁰⁶ The club slashed salaries from ten to thirty-four percent and eliminated four positions for an annual savings of \$11,211.96.¹⁰⁷ One of the most contentious reductions of salaries was that of promotional director William Coker. Leon Tujague charged that in the 6.5 years since Coker assumed the position of promotional director, Coker's salary totaled \$34,000 despite only soliciting \$19,000 in membership dues.¹⁰⁸ Further, Tujague charged that Coker "had been antagonistic in his personal actions towards members; he had shown disrespect to elected officers and members and he made various threats regarding the club."¹⁰⁹ In defense of Coker, Nicholas Callan admitted that he was "not blind to Mr. Coker's faults... [but] Mr. Coker deserved most credit for [the] present club and he felt the differences could be ironed out."¹¹⁰ At another meeting, Tujague motioned to reduce Coker's salary by \$150 per month.¹¹¹ However, the motion was defeated in a narrow vote. President Cousins sided with Coker and urged the board to support him, noting that Coker had approached him with a proposition of great interest to the club. While politics within the club threatened Coker, politics in the state saved him.

On June 21, 1932, Senate Bill No. 245, introduced by Fred W. Oser, was approved by the Louisiana State Senate and would later become Constitutional Amendment No. 12.¹¹² The amendment exempted the NOAC from all state and local taxes – saving up to \$7,000 a year, buttressing its hopes of surviving the Great Depression. How the Oser bill came to fruition exemplifies the effectiveness of the NOAC as a political entity and how members' ties to politics

¹⁰⁶ Governing Committee Minutes, August 15, 1932, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁰⁷ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, December 29, 1932, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁰⁸ Board of Directors' Special Meeting Minutes, January 27, 1932, NOACC (232-31).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, March 16, 1932, NOACC (232-31).

¹¹² Hugh Wilkinson to Joseph Cousins, November 9, 1932, NOACC (232-32).

ensured the club's survival. While the NOAC served the city as an athletic institution, its most prominent members maintained strong ties with Governor Huey P. Long's political machine.

Several years later, club member J.C. Williams would tell historian John Fair that Poché

was originally Huey Long's man. This club never paid taxes for years because of Poché's influence. All the governors came. All the mayors came. All the judges belonged. Every politician came here – all given automatic memberships. At one time anyone who was anybody belonged to this club.¹¹³

While Poché certainly played a role, Oser and Long's mutual law partner, Hugh Wilkinson, did much of the work to eliminate taxes from the list of NOAC expenses.¹¹⁴

Wilkinson wrote a letter to his fellow board members detailing how the amendment came to pass and whose help he had enlisted. Wilkinson thanked Coker and future New Orleans mayor Robert Maestri for their efforts in lobbying legislators. Despite asking President Joseph Cousins to create a committee, a tax committee failed to materialize. Without seeking the board's approval, Coker and Wilkinson had acted alone and traveled to Baton Rouge. Wilkinson and Coker's efforts were

not with any idea on our part of restricting credit to ourselves, but rather because the further we went into the matter the more we became impressed with the difficulties ahead of us, and we thought if we were going to fail, we might as well not drag anybody else into the failure. As Mr. Coker once said when the bill was in its early progress in the Legislature: 'If this goes all the way through, it's a miracle.'¹¹⁵

Coker's work winning support from both parties particularly impressed Wilkinson, noting that the bill "cut down an item of taxation [and] weathered a stormy Legislature which was notable for its ruthless stand against tax reductions."¹¹⁶ Maestri ensured that no "official administration opposition to the bill, which would have been fatal," became public.¹¹⁷ To thank the responsible

¹¹³ Quoted in John D. Fair, "Strongmen of the Crescent City": 424.

¹¹⁴ T. Harry Williams, *Huey Long* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 398, 556.

¹¹⁵ Hugh Wilkinson to Joseph Cousins, November 9, 1932, NOACC (232-32).

¹¹⁶ Ibid., Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

politicians who did enough in “one single stroke to more than pull our club out of the red,” Wilkinson suggested the board grant the senators and representatives from New Orleans to give two free juvenile memberships to boys in their constituencies.¹¹⁸ For his contribution, Wilkinson suggested that Oser be granted an honorary lifetime membership.

Benefits from the tax exemption were not immediately available. Although the law was enacted in 1932, questions remained about whether or not the exemption applied to 1932’s taxes or 1933’s. The board elected Cousins, Maestri, and the club’s attorney, Max Schaumburger to find out the answer.¹¹⁹ In June 1933, the board penned letters of gratitude to Maestri and Poché who used their influence to cancel the 1932 tax burden.¹²⁰ While the monetary benefits were slow to materialize, the tax amendment did more than save money. Section 4, Article X of the tax amendment required that the club maintain a membership over 1,000 members to reap the exemption. While this put pressure on the NOAC not to let its roster drop below 1,000, it also left other, smaller clubs to deal with the additional burden of taxes coupled with shrinking revenue.¹²¹ Another club’s loss could be the NOAC’s gain. When the Elk’s lodge was forced to abandon its headquarters equipped with athletic facilities, Poché saw an opportunity to recruit more members. Poché invited the Elks to take advantage of the NOAC facilities, because these Elks were “practically homeless.”¹²² While the political establishment could help the NOAC, the political establishment could also hurt the NOAC.

Despite the success of the tax exemption and a massive drive for membership, the club still faced financial uncertainty. Richard Foster, chairman of the finance committee, warned that although the club made a meager profit in April 1933 of \$84.34 which much better than 1932’s

¹¹⁸ Hugh Wilkinson to Joseph Cousins, November 9, 1932, NOACC (232-32).

¹¹⁹ Board of Directors’ Meeting Minutes, May 24, 1933, NOACC (232-32).

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Hugh Wilkinson to Joseph Cousins, November 9, 1932, NOACC (232-32).

¹²² Irwin Poché to T.H. Bernhardt, April 26, 1935, NOACC (232-32).

net loss of over \$900, it still projected a loss for May of over \$2,700.¹²³ In anticipation of this potentially dangerous loss, the board authorized the president to borrow \$4,000. The mortgage bonds that financed the club's new building were due to mature on July 1, 1933. The club had established a sinking fund as part of the mortgage agreement for any surpluses the NOAC had to help pay down debt. However, the Finance Committee reported that \$6,333.33 of its \$10,000 sinking fund was frozen in the Interstate Bank due to the federal government's response to depression, and unless the club took some form of action, it would default on its loan.¹²⁴ The board empowered the president to borrow an additional \$6,000 to prevent the NOAC from defaulting on its mortgage payments until its assets could be unfrozen.¹²⁵ With the crisis averted, the NOAC would continue to search for a long-term solution to its financial woes.

After resurrecting the NOAC's role in New Orleans boxing, lobbying nearly 135 members of the state legislature for a tax exemption and having his salary slashed by thirty-one percent, William Coker resigned from his post as promotional director leaving the club in, Coker's words, "most capable hands."¹²⁶ Many of Coker's responsibilities were inherited by Poché, the most important of which was providing entertainment for the membership. Stag parties and dances served the social needs of the NOAC membership. One of Poché's first entertainment offerings was a show and dance dubbed "A Night in Cuba."¹²⁷ The night featured an added attraction as Poché welcomed "members an opportunity to treat their ladies to the salt water swimming" they enjoyed in the club's pool. Swimming was becoming the recreation of choice for many NOAC members. In summer 1933, several businessmen started taking classes

¹²³ The exact estimate was \$2,779.13.

¹²⁴ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, May 24, 1933, NOACC (232-32).

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ William Coker to Joseph Cousins, February 28, 1933, NOACC (232-32).

¹²⁷ Irwin Poché to Dr. Russell E. Stone, June 20, 1933, NOACC (232-32).

with Poché and within a week, “mastered the art of swimming.”¹²⁸ The athletic members picked up honors at meets in Gretna and City Park, while the club’s junior swim team “blaz[ed] to a glamorous victory” at the Southern Amateur Athletic Union championships.¹²⁹ Poché’s “Night in Cuba” was a “howling success” and he pledged that he would allow member’s wives and girlfriends to use the club’s pool in future events.¹³⁰

As the club emphasized its social aspects, the GC established guidelines to prevent members who were behind on their dues from accessing the club by posting doormen at the club’s entrance.¹³¹ However, the crackdown on delinquents proved unpopular among several club members. George Sladovich, Sr. wrote to the club’s president, Leon Tujague, on behalf of “over fifty members... relating to the new experiment of two white Doormen... inform[ing] you that they emphatically disagree with your experiment.”¹³² Sladovich emphasized members claims that

drastic police methods will destroy our club; that the proper and business-like handling would be to call by private letter or personally each well deserving member offering him the dispensation of the membership dues for the whole year, provided that he will within One or Three months secure at least 3 or 5 new members; that ‘new doormen’ will only aggravate [the] present acute situation; that it will be too costly and bound to meet with failure; and that many members will not stand such police practices, and discontinue to be members of the club....¹³³

Sladovich’s letter had no impact. When the board of directors discussed it at their May meeting, they noted that the new doormen had a positive effect and even discussed providing the doormen

¹²⁸ Irwin Poché to Dr. Russell E. Stone, May 23, 1933, NOACC (232-32).

¹²⁹ Irwin Poché to Dr. Russell E. Stone, July 19, 1933; Irwin Poché to Dr. Russell E. Stone, August 15, 1933, NOACC (232-32).

¹³⁰ Irwin Poché to Dr. Russell E. Stone, July 19, NOACC (232-32), while women had irregularly used the club’s pools prior to the “Night in Cuba,” the event marked the beginning of regular use of the pool by women

¹³¹ Governing Committee Minutes, April 16, 1934, NOACC (232-32).

¹³² George Sladovich, Sr. to Leon Tujague, May 1, 1934, NOACC (232-32).

¹³³ Ibid., Emphasis in original.

new uniforms.¹³⁴ The club's manger, W.J. Virgets, informed the governing committee that in just nine days, the new doormen had collected \$2,850 in delinquent dues compared to \$3,100, the amount typically collected in an entire month.¹³⁵

In 1934, looking to optimize their income, the club opted to let rooms. While final plans for the NOAC's building did not include hotel rooms, which were typically the most profitable ventures in athletic clubs, Robert Maestri offered to rent the club a residence across from its location on Iberville Street for \$150/month, without having to sign a lease.¹³⁶ The property's location was ideal for young bachelors living in New Orleans' "Tango Belt" which in the 1920s housed numerous nightclubs and cabarets. Though many of those institutions faltered due to prohibition, illicit businesses remained active including gambling houses and brothels. Notorious Madam Norma Wallace remarked that many who visited her brothel in the area were "Good Men," those who wielded the "real power in New Orleans."¹³⁷ The board of directors readily accepted Maestri's offer and by July, the rooms had only a single vacancy.¹³⁸ With the Volstead Act's repeal, members could finally get a drink at the club's bar.¹³⁹ To encourage the members to partake of the club's liquor, it raised the price of soft drinks, to the ire of Chas Wiggins Jr., who petitioned to appear before the GC to complain about the prices. Wiggins grumbled that when he "wanted to have a high-ball with a friend" the fifty-cent bottle of ginger

¹³⁴ Leon Tujague to George Sladovich, Sr., May 12, 1934, NOACC (232-32).

¹³⁵ W.J. Virgets to Governing Committee, May 9, 1934, NOACC (232-32).

¹³⁶ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, January 24, 1934, NOACC (232-32).

¹³⁷ Christine Wiltz, *The Last Madam: A Life in the New Orleans Underworld* (Da Capo Press: New York, 2000), 35.

¹³⁸ W.J. Virgets to Governing Committee, June 14, 1934, NOACC (232-32).

¹³⁹ While the repeal would conceivably mean a rise in profits, the bar's income continually declined until 1934 and remained significantly lower than its pre-depression totals. However the true impact of the Volstead Act is inconclusive, as bar's income included profits from its gaming machines and other commodities, like candy or cigars. In 1940, the club reorganized its departments, combining the bar's candy and cigars with its sporting goods department to establish the "Counter."

ale he purchased as a mixer was “all out of reason.”¹⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the NOAC was a place where men could be men, share drinks, and enjoy at the stags that Coker and then Poché put on.

On January 20, 1936, the GC informed its manager, W.J. Virgets, to “strictly enforce the rule prohibiting ladies to go any farther than the stairway” except on special occasions.¹⁴¹ This order came after Virgets reported that Sunday dinners offered to members’ wives and lady-friends were growing popular.¹⁴² The Board of Directors also approved a book review luncheon for women, which generated seventy-five cents per woman and cost the club a total of \$3.¹⁴³ Women from the Delphian Club selected the NOAC over the Roosevelt Hotel and La Louisiane to host their monthly teas.¹⁴⁴ With the expanded presence of women came expanded restrictions. The board of directors adopted a resolution entitled “21 Minor Rules” for the club. Rule 17 stated that “Ladies are permitted in the Club only on special occasions. Ladies waiting for members are requested to be seated in the lounge. Ladies and children are permitted to use the dining-room on Sundays from 5 P.M. to 9 P.M.”¹⁴⁵ The club took further steps to accommodate the growing presence of women by consulting with architects Benson and Feitel about constructing a cocktail room for women.¹⁴⁶ The idea of a women’s cocktail lounge conflicted with some club members’ vision of the club, but as Joseph Cousins confided to president T.H. Bernhardt, “If they would resign the Club for a thing like this they would be the type that would miss the Club more than the Club them.”¹⁴⁷

In 1937, the NOAC allowed women to use the club’s bowling alley on every Sunday night. The chairman of the Bowling committee, George Knoop, had revived the department after

¹⁴⁰ Chas Wiggins, Jr. to Governing Committee, January 3, 1934, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁴¹ Governing Committee Minutes, January 20, 1936, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁴² W.J. Virgets to Governing Committee, January 6, 1936 and January 30, 1936, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Irwin Poché to Paul Maloney, Jr., July 13, 1938, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁴⁵ 21 Minor Rules, Adopted by the Board of Directors, February 18, 1936, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁴⁶ Board of Directors’ Meeting Minutes, February 18, 1936, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁴⁷ Joseph Cousins to T.H. Bernhardt, March 14, 1936, NOACC (232-32).

years of a lack in interest and expressed his enthusiasm for the sports' newfound popularity. He attributed the growing interest in the sport to its inclusion of women. Originally, women were allowed to use the alleys between 7 pm to 11 pm on Sundays, but "owing to the large crowds in attendance [sic]," the start was pushed earlier to 5 pm.¹⁴⁸ Seeing an additional source of revenue, the bowling committee again expanded women's access to the bowling alleys, opening the alleys at 2pm – if accompanied by a club member. To take advantage of the women's presence, the committee increased the fee for one game by five cents.¹⁴⁹ The committee also deemed women eligible to win prizes, approving awards each month for the highest men's and women's score, not to exceed \$3.¹⁵⁰ However, the expanded inclusion of women did not reflect any increasing progressive perceptions of gender on the part of the NOAC, but rather it was incentive to entice new members to join. By getting women of high society to occasionally enjoy the club, the NOAC could lure men of high society as members.

Poché opened up the athletic department to women as he introduced badminton to the club. He organized a citywide doubles badminton tournament that drew forty "prominent citizens" to play with other "men and women prominent in the social life of" New Orleans.¹⁵¹ By the end of August 1938, Poché reported between 25 and 30 men and women playing badminton, swimming, and bowling together on certain nights.¹⁵² Badminton's popularity was strong enough that the board of directors authorized Poché to sponsor a citywide doubles badminton championship for women. With the badminton tournament permitting some women access to the club on Wednesday and Friday nights, the bowling welcomed "the wives and lady friends of the entire membership" to also bowl on Wednesday and Friday nights, in addition to

¹⁴⁸ George Knoop to Board of Directors, December 14, 1937, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁴⁹ Bowling Committee Minutes, February 11, 1938, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Irwin Poché to Paul Maloney, Jr., August 23, 1938, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁵² Ibid.

Sundays.¹⁵³ Poché also planned entertainment aimed at appealing to both men *and* their wives. “Family Night at the Club” was a revue of the latest swimwear fashion, followed by mixed swimming, bowling, and dancing.¹⁵⁴

In 1938, after attending a meeting of the National Club Manager’s Convention in Memphis, Tennessee, the club’s assistant manager, J.G. Plettinger reported to the NOAC board of directors several issues relevant to both the NOAC and clubs throughout the nation. The topics of Plettinger’s observations ranged from expenses, memberships, and even food. However, the most important observation concerned cultivating interest in younger generations, particularly through the strategy of family memberships. The family membership, as Plettinger put it, was “the life saver for town clubs in every section of the country.”¹⁵⁵ The membership included services and facilities for a member, his sons up to a certain age, and his wife. Summing up the arguments of other clubs including women, Plettinger wrote that it was “accepted fact that a man’s wife can go wherever he goes, and the wife of today is not contented to stay at home while her husband goes to the club.”¹⁵⁶ Plettinger warned against ignoring women, citing “The Hamilton Club of Chicago, which at one time was considered the swankiest club in the Chicago district... refused to go modern and only a few weeks ago closed its doors.”¹⁵⁷ Aside from its ability to preserve clubs, the inclusion of women could be profitable. Plettinger referenced one club’s women’s cocktail lounge which netted over \$75,000 – common

¹⁵³ Bowling Committee Minutes, March 14, 1939, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁵⁴ Irwin Poché to Paul Maloney, Jr., NOACC (232-33).

¹⁵⁵ J.G. Plettinger to Board of Directors, January 27, 1938, NOACC (232-33); Several years before, Poché discovered that the family membership enabled the Dallas Athletic Club to escape “the hands of receivers” while researching various membership recruitment strategies, see: Irwin Poché to Richard Kingsmill NOACC (232-42).

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ J.G. Plettinger to Board of Directors, January 27, 1938, NOACC (232-33).

sense as Plettinger reasoned it was “a natural thing for a man to spend more money when there are ladies around.”¹⁵⁸

In 1938, the Governing Committee (GC) instructed W.J. Virgets to replace the black men who served as telephone operators with white women. The change “increas[ed] the efficiency,” according to Virgets and improved the club.¹⁵⁹ However, replacing black male employees with white female employees was the last straw for club member Carlton King, who appeared before the GC to explain blatant criticisms against the club. King defended his opinions, explaining that many times “he came to the club to exercise and found women making use of the gymnasium.”¹⁶⁰ When King discovered “the male telephone operators had been substituted by women, he felt that the environment had lost the atmosphere of being a men’s club.”¹⁶¹ In addition to his criticisms of the club and warning that other members had threatened to resign, King confessed that once “he gave the bartender some flowers and remarked that since there were so many women in the club it might be in keeping to have flowers around.”¹⁶² Others like King would keep the NOAC a distinct men’s club, barring women from membership for over sixty years after King appeared before the GC with his complaints. As white women were privileged to occasionally use the facility and enjoy some social events like dancing or bowling, black men could only enter the club for one reason – to serve – and black women not at all.

Blacks served as waiters, porters, cooks, and masseurs in the club. The only privileges employment allotted them were a paycheck. In November of 1934, the GC decided to demote its black chef to the position of second cook and hired a white replacement.¹⁶³ In June 1936, the

¹⁵⁸ J.G. Plettinger to Board of Directors, January 27, 1938, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁵⁹ W.J. Virgets to Governing Committee, October 17, 1938, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁶⁰ Governing Committee Minutes, November 29, 1938, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Governing Committee Minutes, November 19, 1934, NOACC (232-32).

club eliminated all blacks from cooking in the kitchen and hired two white chefs. Virgets reported to the GC that “the members are better pleased with the cooking and where we used to have complaints we are now receiving compliments.... We also have noticed quite a savings in our purchases of foodstuffs.”¹⁶⁴ Blacks also staffed the club’s Turkish Bath as “rubbers.”¹⁶⁵ Baths have maintained a longstanding role in elite institutions. As Donald Mrozek notes, baths were a place where medieval nobles conducted business.¹⁶⁶ Edward Schneider complained to Joseph Cousins that there were too many blacks working in the Turkish bath. Schneider, a manager of the Southern Lumber Operator’s Association, declared that the black masseurs had “been with the club entirely too long.”¹⁶⁷ Further, Schneider questioned the club’s decision to employ blacks during the Depression “when so many expert white rubbers are out of work, is it necessary that you employ negroes to do this work? There are certainly many white men who would be glad to take these jobs for a salary, without tips, which would indeed make it better for members as well as guests.”¹⁶⁸ Schneider ended his letter informing Cousins he was resigning and others in the club would follow suit – if the club continued to employ black masseurs.

“Every Club in the country has difficulty in maintaining their membership,” observed Irwin Poché during an intense brainstorming session of the NOAC’s membership committee.¹⁶⁹ The NOAC was no different. Since the 1920s, the club tried a myriad of schemes to solicit new members. In 1935, Irwin Poché suggested that the club implement a recruiting scheme similar to one run by the Newark Athletic Club. The recruiting plan gave members a credit on dues if they

¹⁶⁴ W.J. Virgets to Joseph M. Cousins, July 20, 1936, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁶⁵ A term for masseurs used during the period.

¹⁶⁶ Donald J. Mrozek, *Sport and American Mentality, 1880-1910* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 12f.

¹⁶⁷ Edward Schneider to Joseph M. Cousins, March 3, 1936, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Membership Committee Minutes, January 9, 1939, NOACC (232-33).

referred a friend to the club who subsequently joined.¹⁷⁰ Poché's involvement in the recruiting drive was not limited to soliciting adult members. The athletic director proposed a program granting the members' sons free juvenile memberships.¹⁷¹ "Every big athletic club in this country, with the exception of the New Orleans Athletic Club," maintained such a program, argued Poché.¹⁷² After some deliberation, the Board of Directors approved the plan, believing that it serve as an incentive to retain adult members.¹⁷³ However, by April 1936, the club's finance committee advised the board of directors to end free memberships to member's children, the referral program, and to cut down the number of athletic memberships offered by the club.¹⁷⁴

The finance committee's proposal to cut athletic memberships caught the attention of L. diBenedetto, the secretary/treasurer of the Southern Amateur Athletic Union and a longtime member of the athletic club. In a lengthy letter to the club's president, T.H. Bernhardt, diBenedetto warned that

the athletic members who now represent us in competitive sport will someday pass out of the picture as athletes, like [you] and I, and unless we encourage Junior athletic competition the day will soon come, when our club has no athletes at all.... [T]he old men like You and I have all the pleasure we want out of our club, but the thing that bothers me most is, that by following... the present policy... the N.O.A.C. will become a social club with no athletics whatever.¹⁷⁵

DiBenedetto argued that cutting athletic memberships restricted the club from winning athletic honors, which was contradictory to the aims of the club's founders. DiBenedetto reiterated that "our club was primarily organized as a Gymnastic [sic] and athletic club and those of us interested in the club today should try and carry out the high ideals of athletic competition of that

¹⁷⁰ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, June, 11, 1935, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁷¹ Irwin Poché to Board of Directors, May 1934, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁷² Irwin Poché to Board of Directors, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁷³ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, July 20, 1934, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁷⁴ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, April 21, 1936, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁷⁵ L. diBenedetto to T.H. Bernhardt, September 25, 1936, NOACC (232-32), diBenedetto served as the National President of the Amateur Athletic Union from 1939 to 1942, the governing body of all American Amateur sports.

band of fine fellows who some 75 years or so ago organized the old YMGC.”¹⁷⁶ For diBenedetto, competitive spirit was “the true American spirit.”¹⁷⁷ DiBenedetto wrote that cutting down the athletic memberships was akin to

a University if it adhered [sic] to the policy of INTRAMURAL ATHLETICS and drop football, basketball and track. No one cares a thinkers dam [sic] for Intramural athletics, but they do pack stadiums for a football game or a Gymnasium for a Basketball game and so on. I could go on for ages telling you what I think of Business Men’s classes.... They are splendid in their place, but the life of competition in athletics is the same as... trading in business. Competition makes for keener interest in everything.¹⁷⁸

In light of the finance committee’s recommendations, the referral program remained in place and athletic memberships were only reduced from 135 to 100. The club looked to recruiting future leaders, when Irwin Poché proposed to the board of directors that the club recruit LSU medical students in New Orleans at a discounted rate of \$2/month.¹⁷⁹ In a letter to Club President Bernhardt, Paul Maloney, Jr., argues that apart from the athletic facilities, the club offered other incentives, such as a reading room and a restaurant within close proximity to Charity Hospital.¹⁸⁰ When the young men became doctors, reasoned Maloney, they might refer their patients to the club to reap the benefits of better health. Further, Maloney explained that the club would aid in the future doctors’ development because “most assuredly man’s recreation, his hobbies, and the environment in which he spends his non-working hours are major contributing factors to the eventual moulding [sic] of his character.”¹⁸¹ Michael Irwin echoed similar sentiments toward establishing medical student memberships as they were “the future backbone” of the NOAC.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁶ L. diBenedetto to T.H. Bernhardt, September 25, 1936, NOACC (232-32).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., Emphasis in original.

¹⁷⁹ Board of Directors’ Meeting Minutes, December, 14, 1937, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁸⁰ Paul Maloney, Jr. to T.H. Bernhardt, December 2, 1937, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Michael Irwin to Paul Maloney, Jr., January 17, 1939, NOACC (232-33).

In May 1937, President Bernhardt addressed the board of directors in a letter with a new recruitment strategy. The club's quickest path to obtaining financial security, he wrote, was through its membership. The letter detailed membership statistics since 1926, showing that an average of thirty-three percent of its members left the club each year, many of whom would rejoin at a later date (see figure 6).¹⁸³ The club had not made a substantial profit since 1930, when it made \$9,933.¹⁸⁴ However, 1930's income had been augmented by a swell in slot machine income.¹⁸⁵ To remedy the situation, Bernhardt put forth plans for an intense customer-service-oriented recruitment plan. The club would aim to engage senior club members that rarely did any service for the club. The ideal man for the campaign "pays his dues regularly, patronizes the different departments of the Club, is well known in the business world and is thoroughly sold on the Club."¹⁸⁶ The program, dubbed the "Century Club," would ask 100 of Bernhardt's ideal members to solicit one of their associates and encourage them to use the club regularly for at least one quarter.¹⁸⁷ Bernhardt's idea met with great enthusiasm among the board of directors; however, in September of 1938, Bernhardt's presidency ended as the board of directors elected Paul Maloney, Jr., as their new president.

Maloney made waves of change in the NOAC. He called upon the membership committee to investigate previous membership drives and decide what methods worked best. Further, the board of directors empowered Maloney to rewrite the club's charter, constitution, and bylaws.¹⁸⁸ Maloney set a tone of business in a memo to the club's GC, describing the committee's function as "the House or working committee of the club" with a "broad power...

¹⁸³ T.H. Bernhardt to Board of Directors, May 23, 1938, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁸⁴ A.E. Dupre to Paul Maloney, Jr., February 12, 1938, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ T.H. Bernhardt to Board of Directors, May 23, 1938, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, December 21, 1938, NOACC (232-33).

more important than all the others combined.”¹⁸⁹ Maloney pledged his allegiance to the club, insisting he was “wedded to no set policy or individual or set of individuals.”¹⁹⁰ Maloney also worked with the membership committee to revamp the application process. The club’s membership drew predominately from the middle and upper classes. Most members worked in sales, finance, architecture, medicine, or law and their correspondence with the NOAC often revealed members to be executives, partners, and presidents.¹⁹¹ While the club strove to acquire more members, it refused to compromise its standards for members. The club served as the elite athletic institution in New Orleans and could not spare time on undesirables; rather, as Irwin Poché put it, the membership committee “should try to get the highest class of men in town to join the Club.”¹⁹² However, the elite stance sometimes put membership committee members in an awkward position when membership was denied. To escape this, Maloney and the committee chair, Michael Irwin, agreed that the committee’s chair should appoint a secret committee of three to review applicants’ worthiness to join the club. This “more systemized manner of handling memberships” was intended to help the NOAC flourish.¹⁹³

Michael Irwin assessed the club’s membership history, which “made a pretty bad looking picture.”¹⁹⁴ From 1926 to 1938 the club had lost thirty-three percent of its members each year when it purged its rolls of delinquent members at the end of each fiscal year. Some left permanently but many were lost temporarily, rejoining when their personal conditions allowed. The largest number of members on roll was recorded in 1928 with 2,820. However, the Depression’s longevity took its toll and by 1937 the club faced a membership low of 2,097. The

¹⁸⁹ Paul Maloney, Jr. to Governing Committee, November 12, 1938, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Starting in 1924, the names of every applicant approved by the membership committee were attached to Board of Directors’ meeting minutes, listing their name, type of membership, occupation, and address of their workplace.

¹⁹² Membership Committee Minutes, January 9, 1939, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁹³ Paul Maloney, Jr. to Michael Irwin, January 19, 1939, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁹⁴ Michael Irwin to Paul Maloney Jr., January 17, 1939, NOACC (232-33).

largest turnover occurred after 1931, when the percentage of lost members was around forty-two percent annually.¹⁹⁵ The financial situation remained stable until 1932, when revenue began to shrink. However, the tax-exemption law, passed in 1932, helped to mitigate the financial threat imposed by the Depression. Yet, with annual turnover at forty percent and losses of \$4,000 each year, the club still required action.¹⁹⁶ The “Century Club” was accepted as the most productive membership drive sponsored by the club ever.¹⁹⁷ Irwin and the membership committee believed if members of the “Century Club” “would exert only a little time and effort in their search for good substantial individuals – and there is no doubt that the City is over-crowded with them – the average turnover in the future would be materially reduced, if not wiped out altogether.”¹⁹⁸

President Maloney also worked to improve other aspects of the club. He lobbied to exempt the club from federal taxes, through his “personal contacts in Washington.”¹⁹⁹ While the NOAC had used its political ties to eliminate the state and local taxes, the club was still responsible for paying taxes to the federal government. With help from the club’s ties in Washington the proposed exemption passed through the House of Representatives and Senate and was signed into federal law; however, after consulting with his father, Maloney informed the board that the club was ineligible for an exemption on federal taxes due to the fact that the club hosted shows and entertainments. Maloney also defined the organizational structure of club, with W.J. Virgets appointed to the position of General Manager, with athletic director, Irwin Poché serving beneath him.²⁰⁰ In regards to his position, Poché wrote to Maloney stating that the club was large enough to employ a “full time ‘Promotional Executive Supervisor’” to ensure that

¹⁹⁵ Michael Irwin to Paul Maloney Jr., January 17, 1939, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Membership Committee Minutes, January 9, 1939, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁹⁸ Michael Irwin to Paul Maloney, Jr., January 17, 1939, NOACC (232-33).

¹⁹⁹ Board of Directors’ Meeting Minutes, March 15, 1939, NOACC (232-33), his father, Congressman Paul Maloney, Sr.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

“the Club [is] something sought after by the proper type of people, as well as increase its daily and nightly receipts.” Already, Poché had invested large amounts of time promoting stag shows and entertainment for both the NOAC and the New Orleans Mid-Winter Sports Association. In November 1937, Poché, serving as the entertainment committee chair for the Mid-Winter Sports Association, convinced the NOAC’s board of directors to sponsor the Sugar Bowl Ball on New Year’s Eve at the Municipal Auditorium.²⁰¹ Poché noted that should he be in the position of promotional director, it would take more time away from his role as athletic director and he needed an assistant athletic director.²⁰² The board agreed that Poché should focus on promoting entertainment, and in 1939, conferred the title of “promotional director” to Poché.²⁰³ However, the most important contribution of Paul Maloney’s presidency was restructuring the club’s debt.

The club maintained a large amount of debt, after rebuilding its clubhouse in 1929. The repayment of mortgage bonds each quarter threatened the livelihood of the club. However, in 1939, under Maloney’s guidance, the club was able to refinance the terms of the mortgage, reducing the interest rate, and making the debt payments more manageable.²⁰⁴ In addition to the managing the debt, Maloney revamped the charter to give the club a broader purpose, adding promotion of health and removing the words “rowing club.”²⁰⁵ Feeling his work was done making the club a stronger, more viable institution in New Orleans, Maloney resigned. However, in his letter of resignation, Maloney warned that “the refinancing of the Club and such other things that have done, do not actually insure profitable operations.”²⁰⁶ Maloney’s efforts

²⁰¹ Board of Directors’ Special Meeting Minutes, November 10, 1937, NOACC (232-33), Support was easy to win for the event, as Poche reminded the board of directors’ that the NOAC had “always identified with the Sugar Bowl activities and most of the members of the Mid Winter Sports [Association] are members of the club....”

²⁰² Irwin Poché to Paul Maloney, Jr., May 29, 1939, NOACC (232-33).

²⁰³ Board of Directors’ Meeting Minutes, May 29, 1939, NOACC (232-33).

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Annual Stockholders’ Meeting, October 11, 1939 NOACC (232-33).

²⁰⁶ Paul Maloney Jr. to Board of Directors, November, 1939, NOACC (232-33), Emphasis in original.

highlighted the end of the club's Great Depression, which put it in position to negotiate another global crisis, the onset of World War II.

The New Orleans Athletic Club faced numerous challenges during the Great Depression. Throughout the boom years of the 1920s, the club's income was large enough to build a lavish, new club house. However, the economic bust of the 1930s threatened to destroy the club. The popularity of boxing and revenues from sponsoring public boxing matches waned. Recruiting and retaining members was a constant struggle throughout the Depression. Through the leadership of its board of directors, the club managed to persevere. Innovation and accommodation were the tools used to navigate the economic crisis. Inventive use of the club's political ties eliminated its tax expenses while limited inclusion of women helped bolster revenue. The club's leadership altered the NOAC's role in the city from one which emphasized the "strenuous life" version of masculinity to one which emphasized social relationships.

The Great Depression was a catalyst for change. The NOAC prided itself as being a premier men's club, yet, to survive, offered more access to women than it had ever done before. The Depression changed everything; from politics to the way people played. In the 1930s, masculinity was changing. However, as severely as the Depression altered the role of the New Orleans Athletic Club, the Second World War forced even greater challenges and changes on America, athletic clubs, and masculinity. In the wake of the war, the club's stag parties, organized by Poché grew more risqué, a far cry from the stag parties of the Depression which featured conservative vaudeville acts, singers, and dancers. The changes that began to take shape during the Great Depression would not resurface again until the 1970s during another period of economic hardship. The formal inclusion of blacks and women did not occur until the late 1980s, when the club's policies of exclusion had taken a considerable toll on the club's

prestige in addition to the financial situation. Some, like A.J. Heinemann could not survive their loss of pride or income during the Great Depression. The New Orleans Athletic Club survived the crisis financially sound, having cemented its status among “one of the most successful clubs in [the] very ‘clubby’ city” of New Orleans.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ “New Orleans Athletic Club,” *Times-Picayune*, October 5, 1929.

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Appendix

Figure 1. NOAC Annual Profit/Loss		
Fiscal Year	Total Profit/Loss	Income from Membership Dues/Locker Fees
1925	31,632.13	57,940.87
1926	33,851.40	61,389.13
1927	41,493.82	69,124.64
1928	39,619.96	67,993.51
1929	38,816.96	79,202.02
1930	9,533.91	76,385.25
1931	-426.74	74,130.10
1932	-5,002.39	71,311.42
1933	-1,265.17	67,072.45
1934	-2,261.98	61,834.43
1935	-11,295.92	60,032.24
1936	-5,634.31	60,211.65
1937	-917.03	65,992.11
1938	-6,441.39	69,011.75
1939	-2,056.74	73,061.57
1940	-4,545.58	68,642.65

Source: Annual Stockholder's Meetings, 1925-1940

Figure 2.a Chicago Athletic Association	Members	3,000	Rooms	120
Income	Receipts	Expenses	Loss	Profit
Barber Shop	24,011	26,304	2,293	
Baths	34,380	36,191	1,811	
Bowling	3,417	5,396	1,979	
Billiards	12,356	10,838		1,518
Cards	5,216	4,902		314
Gymnasium	22,823	16,023		6,800
Restaurant	485,503	479,709		5,794
Rooms	119,393	24,949		94,444
Tailor & Valet	5,164	4,127		1,037
Laundry	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Magazines	34,400	30,521		3,879
Miscellaneous	2,371	3,087	716	
Cigars	164,063	142,949		21,114
Bar	13,501	10,577		2,924
Department Totals	926,598	795,573	6,799	137,824
Profit from Departments				131,025
Dues	342,186			
Miscellaneous	61,609			
General Expenses				
House Payroll		127,026		
House Board		N/A		
Telephone		12,690		
Heat, light, and Power		72,540		
Water		1,091		
House Supply		17,851		
House Laundry		4,523		
Dept. & Repairs Bldg. Equip		85,787		
Entertainment		34,903		
Athletics		2,723		
Stationary, Postage, Etc.		8,534		
Taxes		64,000		
Insurance		6,957		
Legal Expenses		100		
Miscellaneous		42,847		
Total Expenses		481,572		
Interest on Mortgage & Bonds		30,000		
Total	1,330,393	1,307,189		
Total Profit				23,204

Source: Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, December 21, 1926

Figure 2.b Minneapolis Athletic Club	Members	3,400	Rooms	124
Income	Receipts	Expenses	Loss	Profit
Barber Shop	20,668	16,909		3,759
Baths	14,974	17,130	2,156	
Bowling	6,398	5,885		513
Billiards	10,975	6,830		4,145
Cards	7,128	4,825		2,303
Gymnasium	5,984	10,548	4,564	
Restaurant	338,302	321,832		16,470
Rooms	78,083	21,658		56,425
Tailor & Valet	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Laundry	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Magazines	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Miscellaneous	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cigars	73,754	60,621		13,133
Bar	NA	NA	NA	NA
Department Totals	556,266	466,238	6,720	96,748
Profit from Departments				90,028
Dues	171,182			
Miscellaneous	4,434			
General Expenses				
House Payroll*		78,703		
House Board*		10,044		
Telephone				
Heat, light, and Power		43,475		
Water				
House Supply		32,331		
House Laundry				
Dept. & Repairs Bldg. Equip		30,312		
Entertainment		15,852		
Athletics				
Stationary, Postage, Etc.				
Taxes		23,511		
Insurance		4,293		
Legal Expenses				
Miscellaneous Expenses		2,176		
Total Expenses		240,697		
Interest on Mortgage & Bonds		19,582		
Total	731,882	726,517		
Total Profit				5,365

Source: Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, December 21, 1926

Figure 2. c St. Paul Athletic Club	Members	1,700	Rooms	96
Income	Receipts	Expenses	Loss	Profit
Barber Shop	14,791	12,691		2,100
Baths	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Bowling	4,110	5,300	1,190	
Billiards	8,168	4,280		3,888
Cards	7,294	4,924		2,370
Gymnasium	10,277	13,853	3,576	
Restaurant	249,565	234,173		15,392
Rooms	44,353	14,513		29,840
Tailor & Valet	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Laundry	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Magazines	9,943	8,707		1,236
Miscellaneous	4,040	2,564		1,476
Cigars	37,536	32,931		4,605
Bar	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Department Totals	390,077	333,936	4,766	60,907
Profit from Departments				56,141
Dues	144,286			
Miscellaneous	15,300			
General Expenses				
House Payroll*		71,671		
House Board*				
Telephone*				
Heat, light, and Power		21,207		
Water*				
House Supply*				
House Laundry*				
Dept. & Repairs Bldg. Equip		15,330		
Entertainment				
Athletics				
Stationary, Postage, Etc.*				
Taxes		20,066		
Insurance				
Legal Expenses*				
Miscellaneous*		29,692		
Total Expenses		157,966		
Interest on Mortgage & Bonds		41,642		
Total	549,663	533,544		
Total Profit				16,119

Source: Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, December 21, 1926

Figure 2.d Detroit Athletic Club	Members	2,700	Rooms	108
Income	Receipts	Expenses	Loss	Profit
Barber Shop	32,784	28,863		3,921
Baths	16,445	16,358		87
Bowling	5,565	6,700	1,135	
Billiards	8,065	7,355		710
Cards	6,781	4,921		1,860
Gymnasium	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Restaurant	713,660	673,068		40,592
Rooms	101,383	43,668		57,715
Tailor & Valet	7,975	7,074		901
Laundry	1,288			1,288
Magazines	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Miscellaneous	19,948			19,948
Cigars	184,927	147,787		37,140
Bar	33,020	13,173		9,847
Department Totals	1,131,841	948,967	1,135	174,009
Profit from Departments				172,874
Dues	280,467			
Miscellaneous	N/A			
General Expenses				
House Payroll*		230,117		
House Board*				
Telephone*				
Heat, light, and Power		61,612		
Water*				
House Supply*				
House Laundry*				
Dept. & Repairs Bldg. Equip		70,592		
Entertainment				
Athletics		6,184		
Stationary, Postage, Etc.*				
Taxes		36,984		
Insurance		4,810		
Legal Expenses*				
Miscellaneous				
Total Expenses		410,299		
Interest on Mortgage & Bonds		27,546		
Total	1,402,308	1,386,812		
Total Profit				15,496

Source: Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, December 21, 1926

Figure 2.e Milwaukee Athletic Club	Members	2,200	Rooms	110
Income	Receipts	Expenses	Loss	Profit
Barber Shop	26,777	22,159		4,618
Baths	27,020	30,768	3,748	
Bowling	4,421	8,178	3,757	
Billiards	8,725	7,138		1,587
Cards	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Gymnasium	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Restaurant	417,072	393,779		23,293
Rooms	92,922	30,196		62,726
Tailor & Valet	10,710	9,895		815
Laundry	16,871	13,460		3,411
Magazines	19,690	20,140	450	
Miscellaneous	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cigars	107,326	95,520		11,806
Bar	23,619	15,660		7,959
Department Totals	755,153	646,893	7,955	116,215
Profit from Departments				108,260
Dues	239,269			
Miscellaneous	21,904			
General Expenses				
House Payroll*		84,644		
House Board*				
Telephone*		5,594		
Heat, light, and Power		37,223		
Water*				
House Supply*				
House Laundry*				
Dept. & Repairs Bldg. Equip		14,765		
Entertainment*		17,151		
Athletics				
Stationary, Postage, Etc.*				
Taxes		41,072		
Insurance				
Legal Expenses*				
Miscellaneous*		20,241		
Total Expenses		220,690		
Interest on Mortgage & Bonds		54,165		
Total	1,016,326	921,748		
Total Profit				94,578

Source: Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, December 21, 1926

Figure 3. Approximate Construction Cost Approved	
Amount	Number of Votes
\$250,000	0
500,000	39
750,000	158
1,000,000	19
1,250,000	1
1,500,000	1

Source: Special Stockholder's Meeting Minutes, June 27, 1927

Figure 4. Gaming/Slot Machine Income, 1925-1940	
Fiscal Year	Income (\$)
1925	25,545.25
1926	33,680.35
1927	25,511.20
1928	21,273.65
1929	21,013.38
1930	30,178.41
1931	21,451.85
1932	17,977.58
1933	9,903.79
1934	10,356.00
1935	5,511.77
1936	11,932.86
1937	12,368.47
1938	7,241.35
1939	7,499.80
1940	8,427.75

Source: Annual Stockholder's Meetings, 1925-1940

Figure 5. Athletic Memberships			
Athletic Club	No. Active Athletic Members	Dues	No. of Sports
Multonomah, OR	160	None	10
Pasadena, CA	35	None	Swimming
Newark, NJ	100	None	9
New York, NY	250	\$10	14
Athens, GA	73	\$18	8
Pittsburgh, PA	66	None	8
Chicago, IL	75	None	2
Illinois	150	None	2
Pennsylvania, PA	460	\$25	20
St. Paul, MN	13	None	1
Cleveland, OH	12	None	1
NOAC	50	\$24	16

Source: Irwin Poché to Dr. Russell E. Stone, October 25, 1932

Figure 6. NOAC Membership Turnover, 1926-1937			
Year	On Roll	Removed	Percent Lost
1926	2,306	611	26%
1927	2,463	739	30%
1928	2,820	666	23%
1929	2,608	812	31%
1930	2,169	769	35%
1931	2,364	769	36%
1932	2,366	1,079	45%
1933	2,601	1,130	43%
1934	2,388	1,014	42%
1935	2,228	811	36%
1936	2,296	930	45%
1937	2,097	777	37%
Total	28,706		33% Average

Source: T.H. Bernhardt to Board of Directors, May 23, 1938

Vita

Shawn Ryder graduated from the State University of New York at Purchase College in 2007 with a Bachelor's degree in history. In 2009, he moved to New Orleans, where he enrolled in the graduate history program at the University of New Orleans, where he concentrated in Public History. He resides in New Orleans.